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AUTHOR Richards, Janet C.
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ABSTRACT

This 9-month intrinsic case study followed 2 preservice teachers as they learned to teach literacy in 2 consecutive, field-based methods courses. Analysis of data from surveys, dialogue journals, observations, conversations, e-mail notes, and telephone conversations showed a recursive yet distinct hierarchical progression in the preservice teachers' professional knowledge and understanding. Results indicated that the preservice teachers attempted to modify their instruction in response to their week-by-week teaching dilemmas. The results support the efficacy of multiple field placements and suggest that preservice teachers are able to learn from their own teaching experience. The evolution of the preservice teachers' development as novice teachers extended well into the second semester of the program. The preservice teachers needed to learn how to manage groups of students, orchestrate reading comprehension strategies, choose appropriate literature, and link print-based lessons with computer technology. They did not recognize the importance of thoroughly planning and preparing lessons or the connections among teacher planning, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement until past the mid-point in the first semester. (Contains 55 references.) (SM)

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Three Steps Forward, One Step Back: Two Preservice Teachers Learn to Teach in Consecutive, Field-Based Literacy Courses

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Janet C. Richards, Ph. D.
Professor of Literacy
University of Southern Mississippi
730 East Beach Blvd.
Long Beach, MS 39560
e-mail: janetusm@aol.com

with

Donna Brumfield
Graduate Student
University of Southern Mississippi
730 East Beach Blvd.
Long Beach, MS 39560

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ABSTRACT

This nine month intrinsic case study takes an ethnological microanalysis stance to look closely at two preservice teachers as they learn to teach literacy in two consecutive, field-based methods courses. Analysis of the two main data sources shows a recursive, yet distinct hierarchical progression in the preservice teachers' professional knowledge and understanding. Conclusions gleaned from the inquiry indicate that the preservice teachers attempted to modify their instruction in response to their week-by-week teaching dilemmas. The research also supports the efficacy of multiple field placements, and suggests that preservice teachers hold remarkable abilities to learn from their own teaching experiences.

**Three Steps Forward, One Step Back:
Two Preservice Teachers Learn to Teach in
Consecutive, Field-Based Literacy Courses**

Researcher's Question/Third teaching session: *"How do you think today's lesson went?"*

Michelle's Response: *"Modifications have to be made. We have to work at keeping the kids' attention."*

Researcher's Question/Sixteenth teaching session: *"Have you formed a philosophy about teaching literacy?"*

Valerie's Response: *"I am unsure. I do know that every student is different...I do realize now that isolated words don't make much sense. Background knowledge is really important."*

Viewed as exemplary practice, reading/language arts field programs strongly advocated by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) are now common to teacher education programs. Coupled with activities that promote reflection in and on action (Korthagen, 1985; Schon, 1983; 1987; Vacca, Vacca, & Bruneau, 1997), among other things, time spent in the field prior to student teaching has the potential to help preservice teachers recognize that: 1) teachers are responsible for students' learning; 2) there is no single right answer in teaching; and 3) teachers are problem-solvers who are accountable for their own actions (Richards & Gipe, 2000 a).

Research has investigated groups of preservice teachers in attempts to illuminate how teaching experiences might impact their professional development. Many of these inquiries, although certainly valuable because they were conducted in naturalistic settings, tend to typify preservice teachers through momentary 'snapshots in time'. That is, they employ pre-and post semester

interviews or end-of-term large data sweeps to spotlight preservice teachers' filtered reminiscences and recalled moments of reality rather than "documenting [their] everyday life directly" (Jacob, 1992, p. 312). As a result, these studies are restrictive because they offer compressed sketches and summaries that disregard possible gradual transformations and shifts in preservice teachers' cognitions and practices.

Little research has selectively observed preservice teachers for an extended time span.[1] Therefore, "there are surprisingly few details about how individual preservice teachers learn to teach children to read in field settings" (Broaddus, 2000, p. 573). For example, since "teaching is presumed to be a process of on-going learning, reflection, and decision making" (Barr, Watts-Taffe, & Yokota, 2000, p. 464), do preservice teachers consciously modify their decisions and alter their pedagogy in response to their week-by-week teaching dilemmas and interactions with students? Is there a hierarchy of professional knowledge and understanding that preservice teachers construct and build upon from one week to another, or from one semester to the next? Do preservice teachers recursively take steps forward and back as they work toward becoming a teacher? Can preservice teachers articulate slight modifications in their thinking and pedagogy and the reasons for those alterations? The answers to these types of questions have not been sufficiently examined in the extensive body of literature.

[1] Some exemplary case studies have been published by Bullough, 1989; Knowles 1988, 1992, and in the *Journal of Literacy Research, Themed Issue,* December, 2000.

Case Studies and Ethnological Microanalysis

This nine month intrinsic case study[2] takes an ethnological microanalysis stance (Erickson, 1992) to look closely at two preservice teachers as they matriculate through two consecutive field-based reading/language arts courses. Intrinsic case studies, frequently represented in qualitative research, seek to discover both what is common and unusual within a particular setting, and are usually organized around issues that are complex and situated (Stake, 2000; Stouffer, 1941). Systematic ethnological microanalysis offers a holistic perspective of what is studied, and in part, consists of intensely observing individuals as they act, react, and try to make sense of their work in educational contexts (Erickson, 1992; Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2001). As modes of exploration, these two forms of research are time consuming and labor intensive because they focus on minute details of behavior and require numerous personal interactions between researchers and study participants (see Erickson, 1992; Silverman, 1997).

Rationale for the Inquiry

I employed an ethnographic approach in this case study in an attempt to provide a holistic view of the week-by-week thinking and teaching practices of two preservice teachers as they addressed the complexities of learning to teach literacy. As a committed stake holder in field programs, I wanted to focus on a small number of preservice teachers (i.e., a restricted sampling) in an attempt to

[2] An intrinsic case study is undertaken because the researcher wants better understanding of this particular case. Generalizations or theories are rarely drawn from an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2000).

detect specific details and subtle variances in the preservice teachers' professional development. I had a hunch that closely scrutinizing a small number of preservice teachers might contribute unique information to the body of literature and also might help me examine and improve my own practices. This in not to say that the study is divorced or isolated from the context in which the two preservice teachers worked. Rather, although restrictive sampling often is fundamental and necessary to ethnographic microanalysis perspectives because of the precise, detailed nature of data collection, its purpose is to take a close look at participants within a specific educational setting (Erickson, 1992).

The Context for the Inquiry

The context for the inquiry was a K-5 school on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Of the approximate 350 students in Barton School (a pseudonym), over 90 percent receive government-subsidized breakfast and lunch. The majority of students come from single parent, low socioeconomic homes. Students' reading and language arts annual standardized test scores generally fall at or below the 30th percentile. The philosophy of Barton School is teacher-directed. Students are expected to walk silently in the hallways and sit in straight rows in classrooms. Student interactions and collaborations are discouraged.

The Program Structure and The Preservice Teachers' Schedule and Lessons

The field-based program has existed for eight years. Although always student-centered, and literature-based, during the past two years, the program's

philosophy and concurrent pedagogy have evolved in response to new ideas about multiple literacies (see Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997 and Richards, Goldberg, & McKenna, accepted for publication, for a comprehensive description of multiple literacies).

The preservice teachers report to Barton School for two and one-half hours twice weekly for two semesters, and receive 6 semester hours of credit. On Mondays, with my mentoring and guidance, they are responsible for teaching 75-minute lessons to small groups of students (the same group throughout the semester). On Wednesdays, I provide weekly demonstration lessons with the K-5 students, offer lectures, and conduct seminar discussions.

The preservice teachers link print-based activities with the visual and communicative arts (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 1997; Richards, Goldberg, & McKenna, accepted for publication). They also help the elementary students examine commercials and other popular culture media carefully and thoughtfully. In addition, following ideas from Vygotsky's 'Zone of Proximal Development' (1986), the preservice teachers collaborate with their students in presenting student-authored puppet shows, Readers Theatre presentations, and drama enactments. They work side-by-side with their students, scaffolding, modeling, and creating text-based murals, dances, creative books, and songs. In addition, with the preservice teachers' help, students interpret data on computer web sites and CD ROM software, and visually represent facts and concepts by creating graphs, charts, and murals.

Instructional session typically include preservice teachers and their students reading, talking, and writing about books; planning, writing, and editing stories and informational text; participating in literacy learning games created by the preservice teachers; and engaging in reading comprehension and writing strategies (see Richards & Gipe, 2000 b; Richards, Gipe, & Moore, 1995, 2001; Richards, Moore, & Gipe, 1996/1997, for detailed descriptions of the program).

The Two Preservice Teachers

Both Valerie and Michelle (pseudonyms) volunteered for the research project. They were in their last year of undergraduate course work prior to student teaching. Both were non-traditional students ... in their late twenties, married, and having two children each. Their grade point averages were high. During the first semester of the field program both preservice teachers taught kindergarten students. In the second semester, they worked with fourth graders.

Conceptual Frameworks for the Inquiry

Two literatures informed my inquiry: 1) tenets of sociocultural constructivism learning theory which situates individuals within a social context, posits that individuals construct knowledge in transaction with their environment, and suggests that language reveals individuals' knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs (Alvermann, 2000; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Richardson, 1997) and; 2) premises from social interactionism which point out that as mature human beings encounter problems that emerge through their circumstances, they move to

resolve those problems through thoughtful reflection and action (Woods, 1992). I also was mindful of traditions from hermeneutics which "indicate that the same text can be read [and interpreted] in a number of different ways" (Tappan & Brown, 1992, p. 186). In addition, strongly influenced by feminist perspectives and cautions regarding the transactional nature of ethnographic research, I acknowledged the challenges, limitations, and presumptuousness of describing other's behaviors, and representing other's points of view and realities mediated through my own experiences and perceptions (Behar, 1993; Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2001).

Research Methodology

Questions Guiding My Research

In my inquiry I sought to answer the following questions:

1) What themes might be visible in the data that might provide a window into the evolution of Valerie's and Michelle's thinking and experiences?

2) In what ways might Valerie and Michelle adjust their plans for lessons, or alter their instruction in response to issues or problems that occurred in previous lessons?

3) Will Valerie and Michelle be able to articulate modifications in their thinking and pedagogy and the reasons for those alterations?

4 Is there a hierarchy of professional knowledge and understanding that Valerie and Michelle might construct from one week to another, or from one semester to the next?

The Study

My graduate research assistant and I collected weekly data for two consecutive semesters through researcher-devised surveys, dialogue journal entries, observation field notes, and documentation of face-to-face conversations, e-mail notes, and telephone conversations. I constructed the weekly survey questions and we interviewed Valerie and Michelle immediately after we observed their lessons. For example, during the first lesson of the first semester, Valerie and Michelle combined their kindergarten groups, and read a story that was too long and complicated. As a result, the students became bored and were hard to manage. During the third lesson of the first semester, Valerie and Michelle dramatically told the story of *The Three Little Pigs* (Galdone, 1979) as they displayed the illustrations in the text version to their students. They also stopped at appropriate places in the story and asked their students to predict what might happen next. Following this lesson, we asked Valerie and Michelle: 1) "Why did you decide to tell this story of *The Three Little Pigs* rather than read it?"; 2) How does this story and the way you presented it differ from the very first story you read to your students? Through these types of lesson-specific queries, I hoped to gain a fuller understanding of subtle evolutions and patterns in Valerie and Michelle's professional thinking.

Main Data Sources

Valerie's and Michelle's responses to the 59 survey questions (33 questions the first semester and 26 questions the second semester) coupled with observation

notes of their 26 teaching sessions (13 sessions each semester), proved to be the most valuable data sources for the inquiry. I utilized their dialogue journal entries and records of our e-mail and telephone conversations to triangulate the data, a means of reducing ambiguity and the likelihood of misinterpretation, and "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning" (Stake, 2000, p. 443).

Analyzing the Survey Responses and Observation Notes

I considered a number of possible approaches useful for analyzing the 65 transcribed pages of survey responses and observation notes. Because I wanted to provide a basis for an orderly review of possible progressions in Valerie's and Michelle's thinking and concurrent adjustments in their instruction, studying the data as a chronology (i.e., over time) seemed most straightforward and appropriate for accomplishing the task. Thus, the nature and goals of my inquiry determined how I aligned the data.

Following guidelines of content analysis, I conducted "a careful line-by-line reading of the text[s]" Ryan & Bernard, 2000, p. 780). I read and reread the data, looking for distinct categories of meaning. As common patterns became evident, I made notes and underlined what I considered to be salient information (Gay, 1997).

Next, I categorized and labeled the themed topics that appeared across the two main data sets (survey responses and observation notes), cross-checking my impressions and understandings with Valerie's and Michelle's dialogue journal

entries, and records of our e-mail and telephone conversations, and validating my interpretations through multiple conversations with Valerie and Michelle (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Erickson, 1993; Janesick, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Major Themes Emerging from the Inquiry

Analysis of the two main data sources revealed a recursive, yet distinct hierarchical progression in Valerie's and Michelle's professional knowledge and understanding. For example, in response to the survey questions, they were able to describe problem areas in their initial teaching sessions. Yet, despite being able to articulate their errors, often in the first semester, and occasionally in the second semester, they tended to take three steps forward and one step back; that is, although they exhibited on-going improvements in their teaching, they also frequently repeated their mistakes (e.g., reading books to kindergarten students that were suitable for older students; positioning students in disorganized groups that sparked disruptive behavior; and neglecting to fully prepare for lessons).

Examination of the data also showed that after their first few weeks of teaching, Valerie and Michelle often attempted to adjust their lesson plans and instruction in response to issues that arose during their previous lessons. They also served as their own teachers; that is, they constructed a considerable amount of knowledge about teaching through self evaluation and exploration of their week-by-week teaching experiences. In fact, over the course of the two semesters, their knowledge and pedagogy were under ongoing construction as they grappled

with instructional dilemmas and gradually developed teaching competence (Fecho, Commeyras, Bauer, & Font, 2000). They appeared to be influenced positively by my weekly demonstration lesson, but were only minimally impacted by lectures and seminar discussions, even though I attempted to ensure that topics of discussion addressed the preservice teachers' immediate needs (see Zu, 2000). Their confidence levels soared during the later part of the first semester and continued to expand throughout the second semester. Further, the survey questions provided a venue that fostered Valerie's and Michelle's abilities to conceptualize and articulate their decisions and thinking about their lessons.

The following 26 themes show the gradual evolution of Valerie's and Michelle's professional understandings across two semesters (13 lessons each semester), beginning with their first teaching session and concluding with their final lesson (26th session). Note the distinct recursive patterns in their thinking and instruction in weeks one through 13.

First Semester/Teaching Kindergarten Students:1st and 2nd weeks: worrying about fulfilling course requirements, describing anxieties about their own capabilities as teachers, recognizing their insufficient preparation for lessons, recognizing their inappropriate low expectations for Kindergarten students, recognizing their inappropriate choice of children's literature; neglecting to model their thinking for students; 2 and 3rd weeks: describing anxieties about working with kindergarten students and group management problems; 3rd and 4th weeks: recognizing their continued insufficient planning and preparation yet acknowledging the benefits of thorough planning,

recognizing that they neglected to offer reading comprehensions strategies, providing opportunities for students to predict about story events, but not considering prediction as a reading comprehension strategy; 5th week: recognizing their inappropriate choice of literature for kindergarten students and their group management problems; 6th and 7th week: recognizing their inappropriate low expectations for kindergarten students; 8th week: acknowledging the importance of thorough planning, recognizing their improved abilities to keep students on-task, noticing that they needed to offer reading comprehension strategies, and acknowledging their limitations integrating technology with their lessons; 9th week: recognizing that they occasionally continued to choose inappropriate literature for kindergarten students; 10th week: becoming more adept at managing groups of students; 11th week: becoming aware of the importance of teaching reading comprehension strategies and developing confidence and abilities in orchestrating strategies; 12th week: discerning the significance and benefits of choosing appropriate children's literature; 13th week: recognizing that they had infused the visual arts into their lessons, but had not integrated computer technology.

Second Semester/Teaching Fourth Graders: 14th and 15th weeks: slowly developing a philosophy about the teaching and learning of literacy and recognizing that they had the ability to prepare and offer pre-reading, during reading, and post reading strategies; 16-18th weeks: acquiring significant confidence as teachers; 19-26 weeks: complaining about the amount of assignments required in the second semester of field program, developing

significant expertise in planning and offering literacy lessons, and recognizing the benefits of working with K-5 students; 20-26th weeks: developing proficiencies teaching multiple literacies, such as integrating computer technology with print-based lessons and understanding how to incorporate fiction with nonfiction; and 26th week: discerning how to integrate social studies with literature.

Excerpts from Observation Notes and Survey Responses

The following excerpts from our Observation Notes coupled with excerpts of Valerie's and Michelle's responses to the Survey Questions illuminate some highlights of their developmental evolution as teachers.

First Semester

Observation Notes/First Teaching Session "Valerie and Michelle were unsure of themselves today. They were uncertain about their students abilities and their own capabilities as teachers. They did not bring a sufficient amount of activities for the lesson and therefore, they did not keep their kindergarten students busy. They read a book that was too difficult for the students. They were amazed at how advanced some of the kindergartners were, and they quickly discovered that kindergarten students have short attention spans." In response to the **Survey question**, "What are your thoughts and feelings after the first day of working with your students?", Michelle replied, "I am just worried that everything will not be as you want. We did not prepare enough." Valerie stated, "I am not happy. I have worked myself up. I did not expect a lot from

kindergarten students, but I was wrong"

Responding to the **Survey question**, "What would you have done differently on this first day of teaching?" Valerie said, " I should have expected more from this age group. I should have brought extra activities." Michelle responded, " I should have made a visual to go along with the book I read. The book we chose was too hard for the students."

Observation Notes/Second Teaching Session: " Valerie and Michelle had their students seated in a circle on the floor. Both preservice teachers sat next to each other rather than intersperse themselves among their students. The kindergartners were inattentive and talked to one another as the story was being read (*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* authored by Scieszka, 1989). Following the story, Valerie wrote the word, 'reporter' on a dry erase board. "What was the word in the story that began with this letter?", she asked. When the students did not respond, Valerie explained the word, but did not model the role of a reporter." Responding to the **Survey** question, "Do you think you were better prepared today?' Michelle answered, "Yes, if you call being prepared by finishing at 1 A.M., then yes, I was well-prepared, but at the last minute." Valerie replied, "No, I am still unprepared."

Observation Notes/Third Teaching Session : "Valerie and Michelle made pink cardboard 'pig's noses' for their kindergarten students and themselves. Everyone in the group wore the noses as Valerie and Michelle read the story of *The Three Little Pigs* (Galdone, 1979). Valerie and Michelle stopped at appropriate places in the story to ask students to predict what might happen next.

Once again, they arranged their students' in a haphazard seating arrangement that promoted students' inattentiveness." Responding to the **Survey** question, "How do you think today's lesson went?", Valerie replied, " We had to work at keeping the kids' attention. They can't sit still for very long. We were better prepared than last week. Michelle responded, "Modifications have to be made! We have to keep the students on task. We need to remember to arrange our students in a circle."

Observation Notes/Fourth Teaching Session : "Valerie and Michelle were better prepared to teach today. They read *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (Brett, 1987), seated the students in a well-formed circle, and stopped reading the story at appropriate places to provide opportunities for students to draw what they thought might happen next. Both Valerie and Michelle seem more comfortable with their students ... more organized and in control." In response to the **Survey** question, "What was your frame of mind today?", Valerie said, "I feel better-prepared than last week." Michelle replied, 'I was well-prepared today. I stayed up until 11 o'clock getting ready." In response to the Survey question, "What reading comprehension strategies have you offered?' Valerie replied, " None, except we did have the kids do story predictions.' Michelle agreed and said, "We forget to do strategies, but we did have the students predict about story events."

Observation Notes/Eighth Teaching Session : "Valerie and Michelle read the story *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Gag, 1958) to their students. As they read, their students created papier mache 'poison apples'. Valerie and

Michelle displayed a comfortable rapport with their students. They were well-prepared for this session." Responding to the **Survey** question, "What have you learned do far about your students and yourself as a teacher?' Valerie said, "Preparation is the key. Every week I am a little bit more prepared and it makes things easier. We also learned to make a lot of changes in our teaching, like we know what books to read to the kids, and how to sit them in a circle so they pay attention. Michelle replied, "We keep better control of the kids. We keep them on task now. We use books on their level and we get them moving in the middle of stories, like we ask them questions and they paint while we read. We need to offer more reading comprehension strategies though. We try, but in the middle of a story, we forget.

In response to the **Survey** question, "How have you included art or technology into your lessons," Valerie replied, "Art has been fun. Regarding technology, I haven't had one single idea about how to integrate technology." Michelle stated, " Art's no problem, but technology's tough."

Second Semester

Observation Notes/Fifteenth Teaching Session: "Valerie and Michelle's group worked on their drama presentation today. Rather that use quality children's literature, they based their drama enactment on a news report documentary about the school. They supplied a microphone and a video camera. All of the students seemed to be enjoying this activity." Responding to the **Survey** question , "How do you feel today?" Valerie complained about the

assignments due in a few weeks. She said, "There are too many projects due. We have to rush. We have a mural, drama, a case study, a transcription of a lesson we presented, computer technology integration, and on and on." Michelle agreed and said, "This is a lot of work!"

Observation Notes/Sixteenth Teaching Session : "Valerie and Michelle prepared and offered a reading lesson to their fourth graders that centered around the book *Thundercake* (Polacco, 1997). They engaged their students in prereading, during reading, and post reading strategies. After the reading, their students created a group mural depicting their favorite parts of the story. When asked the **Survey** question, "Have you formed a philosophy about teaching literacy?", Valerie said, "I am unsure. I do know that every student is different and some take longer than others to learn to read. I do realize now that isolated words don't make much sense. Background knowledge is really important" Michelle replied, "I don't have one yet., but I do know that reading is thinking."

In answer to the **Survey** question, "Are you more confident as a teacher?' Valerie replied, "Yes, and I am comfortable with the students. I have learned a lot about group management." Michelle said, " As I teach each week, I become more confident. I know what to expect."

Observation Notes/Twentieth Teaching Session : "Valerie and Michelle prepared a lesson that linked the story *Abel's Island* (Steig, 1976) with computer technology. The students researched 'mice' using the software package from the 1999 *World Book Multimedia Encyclopedia.* They modeled the reading comprehension strategy, "Getting to Know Story Characters" (Richards & Gipe

1993)". Responding to the **Survey** question " What were the most beneficial parts of this program so far?", Valerie said, "When I started this program I had no clue about how to manage groups of students. I can make instructional decisions now, and I am more independent. I know what I do wrong and I can correct it. "Michelle said, "The reading comprehension strategies and working with students. I cannot imagine going on to student teaching without this experience."

Observation Notes/26th Teaching Session: "Valerie and Michelle prepared and offered an excellent lesson today. They helped their students plan for a drama enactment based on the story *The Talking Eggs* (San Souci, 1989) They incorporated social studies into the lesson by providing informational text about Creole customs. In response to the **Survey** question, "What course activities were most beneficial to you?" Valerie said, "Our weekly work with Kindergarten and fourth grade students." Michelle agreed and added, "The demo lessons were helpful because we could observe how to work with kids and saw how to offer complete reading lessons that include pre-reading, during reading, and post reading strategies." Responding to the Survey question, "Overall, what did you learn in this program?", Valerie replied, " I learned how to deal with students and to prepare lessons. I have become aware of what grade levels I'd like to teach. I became comfortable with students. Michelle, said, " I learned new ways of teaching literacy. I learned about reading comprehension strategies. I had no idea what strategies were at the beginning of last semester. I recognize when I have to alter a lesson and how to chose appropriate children's literature. I am

confident in my group management abilities.

Limitations of the Inquiry

As with all research efforts, limitations of this inquiry must be addressed. First, case studies are concerned with particulars in a given situation. They usually do not allow researchers to make broad generalizations or build scientific theory (Stake, 2000). This intrinsic case study was confined to examining two preservice teachers in a specific teaching context. Therefore, generalizations to other preservice teachers and teaching circumstances are not possible. "Each case has important atypical features, happenings, relationships, and situations" (Stake, 2000, p. 435).

Second, "ethnography is open to critique" (Florio-Ruane & McVee, 2001, p. 158). "Conscientious ethnographers have...long been aware that in naturalistic settings, the interaction of researcher and subjects of study can change behaviors in ways that would not have occurred in the absence of such interaction" (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000, p. 676). In fact, "post modern critique calls attention to the researcher's presence" (Alvermann, 2000, p. 1341). In all probability, our on-going observations and post observation Survey questions consciously and subconsciously influenced Valerie's and Michelle's thinking and instructional behaviors.

Third, scholars acknowledge the difficulty of separating the researcher from the researched (Alvermann, 2000). The possibility of observer bias "looms large in the thinking of both sociologists and anthropologists in the ethnographic

tradition" (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987, p. 259). As a participant researcher and supervisor of the field program, I may have held subconscious biases that affected my objectivity with respect to what I observed, how I structured the Survey questions, in what ways I interpreted the patterns of data, and what I decided to include in this report. Others reading this case study may draw conclusions that differ from mine (see Tappan & Brown, 1992 for a discussion of hermeneutics).

Fourth, as supervisor of the two concurrent field-programs, I interacted often with Valerie and Michelle both during and after their teaching sessions. I also communicated with them in weekly journal entries and e-mail correspondence. During these frequent exchanges, I offered considerable advice and suggestions about how to plan and present lessons and how to handle group management problems. Surely, my guidance influenced and extended their professional development.

Discussion and Implications for Teacher Education Field Programs

Despite limitations associated with case studies and ethnological research methods, the inquiry contributes considerable insights into the professional development of two preservice teachers as they matriculated through two consecutive field-based courses. The study also supports the value of collecting and analyzing narrative data. In addition, the research offers explicit details about two preservice teachers' professional thinking and ongoing constructions of knowledge that suggest further investigations in other teaching contexts and with different preservice teachers. Further, the inquiry supports the efficacy of field

experiences for preservice teachers and provides information useful for informing my own practice and the practices of other teacher educators who supervise similar field programs.

My conclusion that there was a distinct recursive, yet hierarchical progression in Valerie's and Michelle's professional knowledge and understanding is intriguing and needs to be further explored. Fuller identified stages of teacher development that ranged from concern with self to concern for students (1969). However, little research has documented other categories of novice teachers' transformations. Do all preservice teachers move through a discernible, and perhaps necessary hierarchy of professional development with respect to planning and offering lessons to K-12 students? Do all preservice teachers choreograph their own dance of learning, taking steps forward and back as they develop their abilities to teach? (Fecho, Commeyras, Bauer, & Font, 2000). How best might this recursive progression be documented? What types of course activities, such as e-mail exchanges, seminar discussions, lectures, guest speakers, assigned readings, responding to survey questions, might help preservice teachers recognize and move smoothly through these stages?

Another important finding of the inquiry is that the evolution of Valerie's and Michelle's development as novice teachers extended well into the second semester of the program. The idea that teachers continue to enhance and refine their abilities is not new (Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein, & Berliner, 1988; Fuller, 1969; Grossman, Valencia, Evans, & Place, 2000) . However, the noticeable progression of Valerie's and Michelle's professional growth throughout the two

semesters and their ability to learn about the complexities of teaching through their own teaching experiences strongly support the value of providing opportunities for preservice teachers to participate in multiple field placements. Teacher educators might wish to consider expanding their programs to include more than one semester in schools prior to student teaching.

Despite the apparent minimal impact of my lectures and our seminar discussions on Valerie's and Michelle's professional growth, I remain convinced that I need to directly address preservice teachers' concerns and confusions. Specifically, Valerie and Michelle needed to learn how to manage groups of students, orchestrate reading comprehension strategies, choose appropriate children's literature, and link print-based lessons with computer technology. They also did not recognize the importance of thoroughly planning and preparing lessons and the connections among teacher planning, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement until past the mid-point of the first semester (Byra, & Coulon,1992; Peterson, 1978). In addition, they had difficulty managing their time with respect to assignments. My job now is to reexamine my teaching so that I can determine how I can best meet the needs of my preservice teachers during our weekly lectures and seminar discussions.

Finally, the inquiry allowed me to vicariously experience Valerie and Michelle's week-by week realities as they worked with kindergarten and fourth grade students. Their teaching experiences documented by our observation notes coupled with their responses to the Survey questions serve as a strong reminder that learning to teach is an uncertain, often overwhelming, complex process that

"must be considered holistically" (Cole & Knowles, 1993, p. 469) (also see Clark, 1987). The study showed me that I need to attend carefully to the myriad obstacles and demands preservice teachers face as they gradually take steps forward and back, working toward professional competency. Most importantly, I learned that in order to fully support and best serve my preservice teachers, I need to recognize my own limitations as a dispenser of knowledge and my preservice teachers' remarkable abilities to choreograph their own dance and learn from their experiences.

Author's Note: Valerie and Michelle (pseudonyms) graciously agreed to share their experiences and comments in this inquiry. For further information please contact the author through e-mail: janetusm@aol.com.

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